d) **Depth** - Plant to the same depth as the plants were growing in the nursery if organic mulch will be applied on the surface. When planting without mulch, plant 1-2 inches deeper to allow for soil settling, firm the soil around the plant with your feet and water thoroughly.

e) **Cut Back** - Prune approximately 2/3 of the top growth on bare-root plants and 1/2 on potted plants leaving only 1-3 of the most vigorous upright shoots. Remove any remaining flower buds (plump rounded buds), so that the plants will not flower the first year.

Fertilization

a) **Use Caution** - Blueberries are easily damaged by excess fertilizer. Apply the recommended amount from a soil test report and allow 4 inches of rain or an equivalent amount of irrigation between applications.

b) **First Year** - Do not fertilize immediately after planting. Wait until the first leaves have reached full size, then apply 1 Tbs of a special azalea fertilizer, 12-12-12 or 10-10-10 within a circle 1 foot from the plants. Repeat application of fertilizer at 6 week intervals depending upon rainfall or irrigation until mid-August in the Coastal Plain and mid-July in the Mountains. Use 1/2 Tbs of ammonium nitrate instead of the complete fertilizer for the second and subsequent applications if phosphorus was above 60 on the soil test.

c) **Second Year** - Double the first year's rates, but increase the circle around plants to 1 1/2 ft . Apply the first application when new growth begins in spring.

d) **Bearing Plants** - When growth begins in the spring, apply 1 cup of complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 within a circle 3 ft from the plant. If more vigorous growth is desired, sidedress with 1/4 cup of ammonium nitrate at 6 week intervals. On mature bushes 6-12 inches of new growth is adequate for optimal balance of plant size and yield. Additional growth must be pruned away. This may result in a loss in production, but it is necessary to keep the plants from becoming excessively large. Determine sidedressing requirement based on the amount of shoot growth.

e) **Lowering pH** - If the soil pH is slightly high in an established planting based on a soil test; then sidedress with ammonium sulfate rather than ammonium nitrate. If the pH is 0.5 units or more above the acceptable range, apply wettable sulfur in a narrow band under the drip line of the bush at the rate of 0.1 lb per bush to lower pH 1 unit.

Mulching

Organic material such as bark, wood chips, sawdust or pine straw as a 3 to 4 inch mulch on the surface after planting results in more uniform soil moisture, reduces soil temperature and generally promotes better bush growth and survival. Pine bark, chips or sawdust have a pH of 3.5 to 4.5 and are more desirable than the same mulches from hardwood with an associated pH above 5.0. However, hardwood mulches on the surface have been satisfactory. Avoid sticky hardwood sawdust that will "seal" the bed and prevent water infiltration.

Weed Control

a) **Mulched** - Mulching home blueberry plantings is the best form of weed control. If mulch is applied following planting and replaced at the rate of 1 inch per year, few weed problems should develop. Hand pull or hoe the occasional weed growth. If row middles are in sod, mow often to reduce invasion by runnering grasses and weed seeds into the mulched area.

b) **Not Mulched** - Avoid deep cultivation since blueberry roots are very near the surface. Hoe no more than about 1 inch deep. In addition, hoe often (once every 2 weeks) when weeds are germinating to reduce competition with bush growth and to prevent disturbing the roots that will occur when large weeds are removed.

c) **Herbicides** - There are some chemical herbicides that homeowners can use to control weeds. Please contact your local county extension agent for current recommendations.

Pruning

a) **Highbush** - If the plants are cut back severely as recommended following planting, little pruning will be required the second year except removing all flower buds and any weak, damaged or diseased growth. Use a similar pruning strategy the third year with the exception that several flower buds can be left on vigorous shoots. In the fourth year, the bush should be 4-5 ft tall and capable of handling a crop, but carefully thin flower buds to prevent overfruiting and severe permanent bending of young canes under the fruit